DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE

THE QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the re-establishment of democracy in Portugal in 1974, East Timor, as happened with all the other former possessions of the old empire, should have been decolonized in accord with the norms of International Law and thus its People freely decide their own destiny, be this a full independence inspired by a sentiment and awareness of national identity or be it a choice based on a freely-made evaluation of diverse factors or of ties of solidarity and alliance.

The brutal invasion of this small territory, which geographically lies very close to its neighbour Indonesia, by the army of that bellicose power, set aside completely, from that day to the present, the right of the Timorese People to self determination and to their independence; that inalienable right which is stated in the Charter of the United Nations (articles 1, 55, and 73), and in the two international pacts on Human Rights which were approved by the General Assembly in 1966 and recognized in resolutions of the United Nations, namely resolution 1514 of 1960 and 2625, of 1970. A right which, since 1976, has been expressly enshrined in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, the second revision of which came into force this month and whose present article 7 adheres to such principles:

" Article 7

(International Relations)

1. In international relations Portugal is bound by the principles of national independence, of respect for human rights, of the right of peoples to their self-determination and independence, of equality between States, of the peaceful resolution of international conflicts, of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and of cooperation with all other peoples towards achieving the emancipation and progress of all humanity.

2. Portugal commends the abolition of all forms of imperialism, colonialism and aggression, a general disarmament, simultaneous and controlled, the dissolution of all politico-military blocs and the establishment of a system of collective security, with a view to the creation of an international order capable of ensuring peace and justice in the relations between peoples.

3. Portugal recognizes the right of peoples to rise up against all forms of oppression, namely against colonialism and imperialism.

4. Portugal maintains special ties of friendship and cooperation with the Portuguese-speaking countries .

5. Portugal pledges itself to the reinforcement of the European identity and to the strengthening of the actions of the European States in favour of peace, economic progress and justice between peoples. "

(Non-official translation)

In keeping with the principles of the letter of the law, and its observance in practice, Portugal counts on the support of all the countries which were newly decolonized following April 25 1974, in its efforts to denounce the new forms of repressive colonialism which have been unleashed against East Timor, and it reaffirms in article 293 of the Constitution, now revised, that "it continues to be bound by the responsibilities incumbent upon it, under international law of promoting and guaranteeing the right of East Timor to self-determination and independence." (Non-official translation)

In spite of the attempts to seal off from the outside world the small half of this distant island and enclose it within a wall of silence and terror, it has been possible to appraise the forms which this colonialism assumes: the illegal occupation maintained by force of arms, the militarization of the territory, the physical and cultural genocide (estimates indicate that there have been, at least, 200,000 deaths since the invasion, that is, about 1/3 of the population), the appropriation of all goods and of the economic channels - these are now in the hands of the invaders, the application of a policy of transmigration and encouraging emigration, both legal and clandestine of people from various Indonesian provinces, and thus the marginalization of Timorese at all levels (both in terms of access to decision-making posts and access to education,for example), and furthermore, the pressures and the limitations imposed upon the activities of the Catholic Church (the professed religion of about 80% of Timorese) and the suppression of all civil rights and liberties.

The truth of the facts about the extent of the tragedy which has been suffered by this admirable People has gradually overcome the propaganda offensive erected by the occupant, powerful in terms of territory, wealth and of military strength and influence. This has been attested to, for example, in the recent positions taken by the UN, by Amnesty International, by the Assembly of Countries from Africa, the Carribean, the Pacific and the EEC, by the Conference of the Interparliamentary Union of 1987, by the European Parliament in 1988 and 1989, by the EEC Political Committee, by the members of the House of Representatives of the United States of America, and by the Catholic Church (including the local Church and thinking especially of the letter from Bishop Ximenes Belo to the UN Secretary General calling for a "referendum" as the beginning of a democratic process of decolonization, and of the support he received from, for example,

the Head of the Dutch Episcopal Conference and also from the Portuguese Episcopal Conference).

The heroic resistance to the invasion from the very beginning, the hundreds of deaths, the knowledge of the lists of people that have been imprisoned and tortured and continue to be even today, the subjugation of entire neighbourhoods by means of police and military control, seem to me to already reveal what the results of a democratic referendum, most certainly, will confirm : this genial People, in the space of a former colonial administration of so many years, has come together and formed itself into a Nation, in the expectation (up to 1974 hopeful and serene) that it could organize itself politically along self-determined lines.

I am expressing here a personal conviction because, as is obvious, the Portuguese authorities concede to the Timorese People, and to them alone, the right to make, without coercion, their own options, and Portugal accepts whatever result as comes from a free consultation of the People. It is a conviction, however, which is widely shared by all those who have seen, in the violent traces of the Indonesian army's march over Timorese soil, and in the resulting necessity to shut off the territory from the eyes of the world (from normal contacts with the exterior), the unequivocal signs that the Timorese continuously sacrifice their security and their very lives for the future of their homeland and for their national identity.

Furthermore, this year has seen a reintensification of violence and intimidation, in the run-up to eventual important visits which had been announced and which could not merely consist of guided tours, where only that which is convenient to be seen is on show.

I was for many years involved in working with issues relating to Portuguese emigration and this experience leads me to consider that the Timorese are nowadays treated , not like those foreigners who I saw harmoniously integrated into the societies and economies of those countries to which they had emigrated, who encountered respect both for themselves as people and for the values of multiculturalism, but rather as strangers, who are persecuted and discriminated against, in the land which was, and still is, their own.

Mister Chairman:

Although recognising the efforts which the UN has made up to now, we are anxious for an urgent decolonization of Timor, for years

have gone by and with each day that passes it is too late for more Timorese...

In Portugal there is no issue on which there is more unanimity than this one, which unites all the organs of sovereignty, the political parties, all quarters of opinion and the citizens, in the same endeavour: that of fraternally ensuring the Timorese the right to live in peace and freedom. Shall we, therefore, allow their cry for freedom to die in our silence?

This is the commitment which we ask of the UN, of the other international organizations and of all those who, in this troubled final part of the century, fight for human rights, for justice and for peace.

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Maria Manuela Aguiar